

Message Text

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TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PINS, IN, NP

SUBJ: NEPAL AND THE INDIAN ELECTIONS

REF: KATHMANDU 1070

1. NEPAESE REACTION TO THE STUNNING JANATA VICTORY IN INDIA IS ONE BEWILDERMENT AND SURPRISE, COUPLED WITH GROWING CONCERN ABOUT WHAT THE ELECTIONS PORTEND FOR THE FUTURE OF INDO-NEPALI RELATIONS.

2. THAT FEW FORESAW THE OUTCOME IS WITNESSED BY THE FACT THAT THE KING AN "UNOFFICIAL" VISIT TO INDIA THIS MONTH EVEN BEFORE THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS WAS KNOWN (REFTEL). ACCORDING TO RELIABLE SOURCES THE KING HAD FULLY INTENDED TO BE ONE OF THE FIRST TO CONGRATULATE MRS. GHANDI AND TO CONTINUE THE HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL DIALOGUE BEGUN IN 1976 BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND PRINCE GYANENDRA. THAT TRIP IS NOW BEING RECONSIDERED. PAACE ADVISOR CHIRAN THAPA TOLD THE DCM MARCH 23 THAT ALTHOUGH THE KING WOULD PROBABLY GO TO SOUTH INDIA FOR THE RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE AS ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED, "CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE VISIT" WERE
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UNDER REVIEW.

3. OF IMMEDIATE CONCERN IS THE GOVERNMENT'S PROBLEM OF WHAT TO DO WITH NEPALI CONGRESS PARTY LEADER P.P. KOIRALA WHOSE CLOSE TIES WITH J.P. NARAYAN AND THE SOCIALIST ELEMENTS OF THE JANATA ALLIANCE COULD CREATE SERIOUS PROBLEMS IN BILATERAL RELATIONS. ALTHOUGH THE JANATA CALL FOR KOIRALA'S RELEASE FROM JAIL COULD

BE DISMISSED A WEEK AGO AS ELECTIONEERING, THERE IS CONCERN NOW THAT THE NEW INDIAN GOVERNMENT COULD EXERT CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE TO EFFECT HIS RELEASE. ACCORDING TO EMBASSY SOURCES, B.P. KOIRALA AS LATE AS MARCH 20 REJECTED ANY HINT OF COMPROMISE WITH THE PALACE WHEREBY HIS RELEASE WOULD BE GRANTED IN RETURN FOR A PUBLIC STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE PARTYLESS PANCHAYAT SYSTEM. PALACE ADVISORS HAVE ALREADY EXPRESSED SOME UNEASINESS OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF AN EXPOSE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN NEPAL, AND THE ATTITUDE OF THE LEADERS OF THE NEW INDIAN GOVERNMENT, WILL DO LITTLE TO ASSUAGE THOSE CONCERNS.

4. THERE HAS BEEN MOUNTING CRITICISM WITHIN NEPAL OVER THE PRESENT ELECTORAL PROCESS (OR LACK THEREOF,) AND THE ASTOUNDING DEMONSTRATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN INDIA HAS ONLY HIGHLIGHTED THE LACK OF ANY LEGITIMATE INSTITUTIONS IN NEPAL TO EXPRESS OPPOSITION. BASED ON PAST PERFORMANCE, HOWEVER, WE WOULD EXPECT THE KING TO DIG HIS HEELS IN EVEN MORE FIRMLY ON THE ISSUE OF KOIRALA'S RELEASE, AS WELL AS ON THE MERITS OF THE PRESENT POLITICAL SYSTEM, AND WORRY ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES WITH INDIA LATER. NEPALESE OFFICIALS ARE BUSY TRYING WITH INDIA LATER. NEPALESE OFFICIALS ARE BUSY TRYING TO FATHOM THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE DIVERSE ELEMENTS WHICH MAKE UP THE JANATA ALLIANCE. ONE JOURNALIST CLOSE TO THE GOVERNMENT ARGUED THAT THE SOCIALISTS WILL BE OVERSHADOWED BY THE JANA SANGH WHICH HAS CONSIDERABLE SYMPATHY WITH NEPAL AS THE ONLY HINDU MONARCHY IN THE WORLD.

5 OTHERS WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED HAVE SOUGHT REFUGE IN THE HOPE THAT THE NEW INDIAN GOVERNMENT WILL BE FORCED TO DEVOTE ITS ATTENTION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO DOMESTIC PROBLEMS OVER THE SHORT TERM AND WILL IGNORE NEPAL. THEY ALSO ARGUE, PERHAPS CONTRADICTORILY, THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL BE MORE CONSERVATIVE AND BUSINESS ORIENTED AND THEREFORE MORE SYMPATHETIC TO CONCLUDING A QUICK TRADE AND TRANSIT AGREEMENT WITH KATHMANDU.

6. PRIME MINISTER TULSI GIRI HAS TOLD FRIENDS THAT THE ELECTION HAS SEALED HIS FATE AND THAT HE EXPECTS TO BE REMOVED AS PRIME MINISTER IN MID-APRIL. GIRI HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED WITH A PRO-INDIA POLICY AND WITH THE CONGRESS PARTY. ALTHOUGH WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE KING HAS MADE NO FIRM DECISION ON A NEW GOVERNMENT, SPECULATION CONTINUES TO CENTER AROUND EX-PRIME MINISTER KIRITI NIDHI BISTA AS THE LOGICAL CHOICE TO SUCCEED GIRI.

7. PRESS REACTION, TOO, IS LIMITED. THE FEW EDITORIALS TO APPEAR HAVE BEEN LIMITED TO BLAND STATEMENTS PRAISING THE RENAISSANCE OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA AND HAVE NOT TOUCHED UPON THE IMPLICATIONS FOR INDO-NEPALI RELATIONS. THE CURRENT WATCHWORD AMONG POLITICIANS IS CAUTION. WE WOULD EXPECT IT WILL BE SEVERAL

WEEKS, AT LEAST, BEFORE ANY DISCERNIBLE GOVERNMENT LINE
DEVELOPS.
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